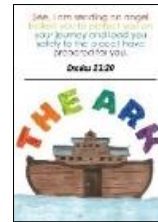


St Michael's CE (A) Primary School - The Ark

Social, Emotional and Mental Health SEND Unit for 4–11-year-olds

“See, I am sending an angel before you to protect you on your journey and lead you safely to the place I have prepared for you.” Exodus 23: 20



Ethos and underpinning principles

Children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties (SEMH) may experience a wide range of difficulties that manifest in many ways. These include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying behaviours that challenge. It is recognised that these behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harm, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. At St Michael's we offer a nurturing environment where forgiveness, reconciliation and second chances are given; and we ensure the principles of a nurturing environment underpin the curriculum we offer, namely that:

- Children's learning is understood developmentally.
- The classroom offers a safe base.
- Nurture is important for the development of self-esteem.
- Language is understood as a vital means of communication.
- All behaviour is communication.
- Transitions are significant in the lives of children.

At 'The Ark' we aim to support children whose SEMH needs mean they need provision that is not routinely found within mainstream educational settings. The service is positioned to support children whose SEMH needs are as a result of early childhood trauma and present primarily through behaviours which make them vulnerable: attachment needs, anxiety, low mood, low self-esteem (etc). While sometimes these underlying difficulties may result in challenging, aggressive and complex behaviours, this must not be the pupil's primary form of communication.

We believe the evidence to be compelling that providing a safe, nurturing, predictable and caring environment - based upon attachment principles - is likely to support our pupil's SEMH development. Therefore, our provision is designed with this in mind.

In order to achieve this goal, we have provision which includes: a nurture room, therapeutic spaces, availability of sensory equipment, an enhanced PSHE curriculum focused on specific areas of need for individual young people and partnerships with supportive external agencies such as CAMHS and Outreach.

Positive Relationships

However, core to all we do at The Ark, are **positive relationships**. As opposed to discipline, caring and respecting is what changes the behaviour of pupils. Pupils with SEMH will have experienced challenging relationships outside of school or in school and learning to trust others is key to supporting pupils to be positive citizens with a desire to improve. Showing pupils that they matter and genuinely emotionally investing in their development makes the most significant difference for them.

Experiences

Many pupils with SEMH cannot see beyond the classroom, where they struggle with learning, or the space in the corridor where they work on a one-to-one basis with their teaching assistant. Supporting pupils to embrace different learning opportunities, whether that be gardening, creating a sculpture or visiting a local place of interest, helps pupils to see that there is a life beyond their school. It builds the cultural capital of pupils, but also encourages them to develop the belief that there are things “out there” that they can access and that there is a reason to behave today. Many pupils with SEMH lose out on these opportunities

because their behaviour is a barrier, but for these pupils, for whom school is a place which lowers their self-esteem, engaging with things outside of school is often a turning point.

Celebrating the small stuff

There can be, at times, little to celebrate for our most vulnerable pupils, so noticing the small things is key – that one time we notice that a child did not swear when they wanted to. We celebrate with them and this teaches them that they can get attention for positive behaviour. Many SEMH pupils find accepting praise very challenging, so finding quiet ways to praise at first can be key. When times get tough, reflecting back on these moments can be significant in reminding a pupil of a time when they did get it right.

Flexibility

SEMH is a vast spectrum of need and pupils are very different. We need to understand our pupils and then meet their needs in a responsive, reflective and flexible way. The provision we offer pupils daily has to change to meet the needs of the children in our care.

Wellbeing

Improving pupils' understanding of themselves is key to developing their intrinsic desire to be the best they can be and to make positive life choices. Therefore, providing a curriculum that promotes positive mental health and emotional wellbeing is fundamental to the development of the pupils in our care. For pupils who have coped with challenging life experiences, it is important for them to understand that their feelings and emotions are normal and valid.

Overall, it is our responsibility to show all the young people in our care that they are loved unconditionally, valued as a child uniquely made in the image of God and given the opportunity to flourish, realising their hopes and aspirations.

Ratified by Governing Body